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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 001133

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SUBJECT: TSCTP FUNDED REINSERTION OF EX-COMBATANTS
PROGRESSES IN TAHOUA

REF: NIAMEY 1023

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER ZACH HARKENRIDER FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Reftel reported on the first phase of project implementation for the partly TSCTP funded Tuareg ex-combatant reinsertion program. Further information was forthcoming at the second and final ceremony, held in Tahoua on October 6. Poloff represented the mission at an event targeting ex-combatants from the Azawak - the region north of Tahoua along the Malian border where the rebellion first began. To all appearances, the successes of the Air (northern Niger near Agadez and Algeria) have been replicated in Tahoua, where 100% of registered ex-combatants have completed the program and received their micro-credit checks. UNDP's reinsertion program sheds light on the challenges of working in the nomadic zone, and underscores the continued importance of this turbulent region to Mission CT concerns. END SUMMARY

THE IMPORTANCE OF NORTH
TAHOUA REGION: THE AZAWAK

¶2. (U) The northern part of Niger's Tahoua region is known as the Azawak (alternatively spelled Azaouagh). Bordering Mali and Algeria it is home to diverse nomadic and sedentary groups - Arabs as well as Tuaregs, Hausas, Djermas, and Fulanis. It was here that the Tuareg rebellion began; here that the Arab vs. Tuareg element of that conflict flared most violently; and, here that the reinsertion program has found the largest number of participants. Tahoua region (which for the purposes of this program also includes the Filingue district of Tillaberi region) counts seven ex-rebel fronts to Agadez's six, and 1,630 registered ex-combatants to Agadez's 1,472. UNDP's efforts have proven even more successful here than in Agadez region. The UN has organized 100% of the ex-combatants into viable cooperatives, compared to 73% in Agadez. To the extent that this signals a peace "buy in" on the part of ex-rebels in the Azawak, it is a good augury for peace and stability in the zone of Niger closest to the Malian towns of Kidal and Gao.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF EX-COMBATANTS
CONFIRMS "HOT SPOTS," FOR MISSION MONITORING

¶3. (C) The names Tchintabaraden, Abalak, and Tassara all figure prominently in the history of the Tuareg rebellion.

They figure prominently too, in UNDP's list of ex-combatants' zones of residence. Post-rebellion economic dislocations (most prominently the drought, locust, and food crisis combination of 2004 - 2005) apparently did not dislodge as many Tuaregs as did the famines of the 1980s, which led many nomads, their flocks decimated, to head for cities and towns to find a living. Aside from small numbers in Niamey (26), and Tahoua city (38) most ex-combatants remain concentrated in just a few places. Add to the aforementioned the Arab town of Tillia, and the town of Tamaya, and one gets a complete picture of the zone at the source of most of our security concerns.

¶4. (C) Bordering Mali's Kidal region, the site of a recent manifestation of Tuareg discontent, the Azawak also touches Algeria in the north. Its Arab community, a "minority within a minority," has a troubled history with the Tuaregs - the former supported the GON during the rebellion - and cultural-linguistic links to the population of southern Algeria. The Arabs are also beneficiaries of this program. Given the ethnic antagonisms of the past, the turbulence of Mali's north and Algeria's south today, weak governance and a lack of economic opportunity, these Azawak towns remain areas of concern from a CT perspective. Ensuring fairness (both actual and perceived) and transparency in the administration of the program is essential, as any perception of partiality along ethnic or sub-regional lines would cause real problems. While the stakes for success in these towns are high, and the cultural / historical terrain rough, UNDP seems to have done a good job in ensuring that the cooperatives from each of these areas get their fare share of microcredit.

¶5. (C) Of the 1,630 ex-combatants in the Tahoua region, 387 (24%) hail from Abalak; 116 (7%) from Tamaya; 383 (23.5%)

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from Tchintabaraden; 108 (6.6%) from Tillia; and, 466 (29%) from tiny Tassara. Each town's share of the microcredit pot corresponds to these percentages, ensuring fairness in both appearance and fact.

MAKING THE PROGRAM FIT: TAILORING TO
THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF NIGER'S NOMADS

¶6. (U) With 145 cooperatives spread across eleven communes from the Algerian border to Niamey (where 26 resident ex-combatants were organized into three collectives), management of the Tahoua branch of the project is a logistical challenge. UNDP seems to be stretching donor dollars as far as possible, managing the project out of a small and modestly furnished office in Tahoua. United Nations Volunteer (UNV) project staff, charged with training and monitoring the activities of each of the cooperatives, are equipped with dirt bikes that enable them to travel as much as 2,000 kilometers a week as they make their rounds. Their responsibilities divided geographically, each trainer is responsible for between nine and twenty-nine cooperatives; 108 and 361 ex-combatants; and, between 10,164,000 and 35,145,000 million CFA (approximately \$19,890 - \$68,777) in funds.

¶7. (U) Grouped into cooperatives, each ex-combatant will eventually receive 165,000 CFA (approximately \$323.00) in micro-credit finance. The cooperatives received eighty percent of this money up front, at the October 6 ceremony. At the rate of 132,000 CFA per participant (approximately \$258.00), that totals 215,160,000 CFA (approximately \$421,056). The remaining twenty percent will only be freed up once UNDP evaluates progress on each micro-project. There is reason to believe that the vast majority of cooperatives will be successful enough to obtain the second installment of funds. The activities they propose to engage in - vetted prior to approval by UNDP, and monitored by the itinerant UNV trainers - seem realistic and within the participants'

capacities.

18. (U) Sixty-two cooperatives will receive support for animal husbandry activities; thirteen for granary operations; forty-six for cooperative village stores; and, a dozen more for rice and grain sales, among other activities. Each is a good fit given local economic realities and the existing skills of the participants. The ex-combatants themselves have money at stake in these activities, providing anywhere from CFA 70,000 (\$137.00) to 660,000 (\$1,292.00) from their own collective pockets in order to support their new businesses.

COMMENT:

19. (C) UNDP's approach to the reinsertion activity seems to satisfy all actors from the GON to the ex-combatants. While the latter would appreciate more money, and were not hesitant to say so, UNDP res. rep. assured the audience at Friday's event that his organization was exploring ways to follow up on this activity. Ensuring calm in the Azawak is one of the most important preventive actions we can undertake via TSCTP, and, given the multi-donor commitment, it need not even be that expensive. Post has requested another \$200,000 in ESF for the next fiscal year to augment these efforts. Microcredit lending - geared to the economic realities of the region and vigorously monitored by a flexible and efficient UNDP presence - seems the best tool to help the nomadic communities of the Air and Azawak build a peaceful future that they will have a real stake in maintaining. END COMMENT
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